

Teachers—Adult Literacy and Remedial Education

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Significant Points

- Many adult literacy and remedial education teachers work part time and receive no benefits; unpaid volunteers also teach these subjects.
- Most programs require teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree; a public school teaching license is required for public programs in some States.
- Opportunities for teachers of English as a second language are expected to be very good because their classes should be in demand by the increasing number of residents with limited English skills.

Nature of the Work

Adult literacy and remedial education teachers instruct adults and out-of-school youths in reading, writing, speaking English, and performing elementary mathematical calculations—basic skills that equip them to solve problems well enough to become active participants in our society, to hold a job, and to further their education. The instruction provided by these teachers can be divided into three principle categories: *remedial or adult basic education (ABE)* is geared toward adults whose skills are either at or below an eighth-grade level; *adult secondary education (ASE)* is geared towards students who wish to obtain their General Educational Development (GED) certificate or other high school equivalency credential; and *English literacy* instruction for adults with limited proficiency in English. Traditionally, the students in these adult education classes have been primarily those who did not graduate high school or who passed through school without acquiring the knowledge needed to meet their educational goals or to participate fully in today's high-skill society. Increasingly, however, students in these classes are immigrants or other people whose native language is not English. Educators who work with adult English-language learners are usually called *teachers of English as a second language (ESL)* or *teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL)*.

Remedial education teachers, more commonly called adult basic education teachers, teach basic academic courses in mathematics, languages, history, reading, writing, science, and other areas, using instructional methods geared toward adult learning. They teach these subjects to students 16 years of age and older who demonstrate the need to increase their skills in one or more of the subject areas mentioned. Classes are taught to appeal to a variety of learning styles and usually include large-group, small-group, and one-on-one instruction. Because the students often are at different proficiency levels for different subjects, adult basic education teachers must make individual assessments of each student's abilities beforehand. In many programs, the assessment is used to develop an individualized education plan for each student. Teachers are required to evaluate students periodically to determine their progress and potential for advancement to the next level.

Teachers in remedial or adult basic education may have to assist students in acquiring effective study skills and the self-confidence they need to reenter an academic environment. Teachers also may encounter students with a learning or physical disability that requires additional expertise. Teachers should possess an understanding of how to help these students achieve their goals, but they also may need to have the knowledge to detect challenges their students may have and provide



Adult literacy teachers use role-playing and problem-solving exercises to help students learn.

them with access to a broader system of additional services that are required to address their challenges.

For students who wish to get a GED credential in order to get a job or qualify for postsecondary education, adult secondary education, or GED, teachers provide help in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to pass the test. The GED tests students in subject areas such as reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, while at the same time measuring students' communication, information-processing, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills. The emphasis in class is on acquiring the knowledge needed to pass the GED test, as well as preparing students for success in further educational endeavors.

ESOL teachers help adults to speak, listen, read, and write in English, often in the context of real-life situations to promote learning. More advanced students may concentrate on writing and conversational skills or focus on learning more academic or job-related communication skills. ESOL teachers teach adults who possess a wide range of cultures and abilities and who speak a variety of languages. Some of their students have a college degree and many advance quickly through the program owing to a variety of factors, such as their age, previous language experience, educational background, and native language. Others may need additional time due to these same factors. Because the teacher and students often do not share a common language, creativity is an important part of fostering communication in the classroom and achieving learning goals.

All adult literacy and remedial teachers must prepare lessons beforehand, do any related paperwork, and stay current in their fields. Attendance for students is mostly voluntary and course work is rarely graded. Many teachers also must learn the latest uses for computers in the classroom, as computers are increasingly being used to supplement instruction in basic skills and in teaching ESOL.

Working Conditions

A large number of adult literacy and remedial education teachers work part time. Some have several part-time teaching assignments or work full time in addition to their part-time teaching job. Classes for adults are held on days and at times that best accommodate students who may have a job or family responsibilities.

Because many of these teachers work with adult students, they do not encounter some of the behavioral or social problems sometimes found with younger students. Adults attend by choice, are highly motivated, and bring years of experience to the classroom—attributes that can make teaching these students rewarding and satisfying. However, many adult education programs are located in cramped facilities that lack modern amenities, which can be frustrating for teachers.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Requirements for teaching adult literacy and basic and secondary education vary by State and by program. Programs that are run by State and local governments require high accountability to student achievement standards. Most States require teachers in these programs to have some form of credential; the most common are a public school teacher license, an adult education credential, or both. However, programs in States that do not have these requirements still generally require that adult education teachers have at least a bachelor's degree and, preferably, a master's degree. Teaching experience, especially with adults, also is preferred or required. Those programs run by private religious, community, or volunteer organizations generally develop standards based on their own needs and organizational goals, but generally also require paid teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree. Volunteers usually do not need a bachelor's degree, but often must attend a training program before they are allowed to work with students.

Most programs recommend that adult literacy and basic and secondary education teachers take classes or workshops on teaching adults, using technology to teach, working with learners from a variety of cultures, and teaching adults with learning disabilities. ESOL teachers also should have courses or training in second-language acquisition theory and linguistics. In addition, knowledge of the citizenship and naturalization process may be useful. Knowledge of a second language is not necessary to teach ESOL students, but can be helpful in understanding the students' perspectives. GED teachers should know what is required to pass the GED and be able to instruct students in the subject matter. Training for literacy volunteers usually consists of instruction in effective teaching practices, needs assessment, lesson planning, the selection of appropriate instructional materials, characteristics of adult learners, and cross-cultural awareness.

Adult education and literacy teachers must have the ability to work with students who come from a variety of cultural, educational, and economic backgrounds. They must be understanding and respectful of their students' circumstances and be familiar with their concerns. All teachers, both paid and volunteer, should be able to communicate well and motivate their students.

Professional development among adult education and literacy teachers varies widely. Both part-time and full-time teachers are expected to participate in ongoing professional development activities in order to keep current on new developments in the field and to enhance skills already acquired. Each State's professional development system reflects the unique needs and organizational structure of that State. Attendance by

teachers at professional development workshops and other activities is often outlined in State or local policy. Some teachers are able to access professional development activities through alternative delivery systems such as the Internet or distance learning.

Opportunities for advancement for adult education and literacy teachers again vary from State to State and program to program. Some part-time teachers are able to move into full-time teaching positions or program administrator positions, such as coordinator or director, when such vacancies occur. Others may decide to use their classroom experience to move into policy work at a nonprofit organization or with the local, State, or Federal government or to perform research.

Employment

Teachers of adult literacy and remedial education held about 98,000 jobs in 2004. About 1 in 3 was self-employed. Many additional teachers worked as unpaid volunteers. Many of the jobs are federally funded, with additional funds coming from State and local governments. State and local governments employ the majority of these teachers, who work in adult learning centers, libraries, community colleges, juvenile detention centers, and corrections institutions, among other places. Others work for private educational institutions and for social service organizations, such as job-training or residential care facilities.

Job Outlook

Opportunities for jobs as adult literacy and remedial education teachers are expected to be favorable. Employment is expected to grow as fast as the average for all occupations through 2014, and a large number of job openings is expected due to the need to replace people who leave the occupation or retire.

As employers increasingly require a more literate workforce, workers' demand for adult literacy, basic education, and secondary education classes is expected to grow. Significant employment growth is anticipated especially for ESOL teachers, who will be needed by the increasing number of immigrants and other residents living in this country that need to learn, or improve, their English skills. In addition, greater proportions of these groups are expected to take ESOL classes. Demand for ESOL teachers will be greatest in States that have large populations of residents who have limited English skills—such as California, Florida, Texas, and New York,. However, many other parts of the Nation have begun to attract large numbers of immigrants, making good opportunities in this field widely available.

The demand for adult literacy and basic and secondary education often fluctuates with the economy. When the economy is good and workers are hard to find, employers relax their standards and hire workers without a degree or GED or good proficiency in English. As the economy softens, employers can be more selective, and more students may find that they need additional education to get a job. In addition, adult education classes often are subject to changes in funding levels, which can cause the number of teaching jobs to fluctuate from year to year. In particular, budget pressures may limit Federal funding of adult education, which may cause programs to rely more on volunteers if other organizations and governments do not make up the difference. Other factors such as immigration policies and the relative prosperity of the United States compared with other countries also may have an impact on the number of immigrants entering this country and, consequently, on the demand for ESOL teachers.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of adult literacy and remedial education teachers were \$18.74 in May 2004. The middle 50 percent earned between \$14.07 and \$25.49. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$10.57, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$34.94. Part-

time adult literacy and remedial education instructors are usually paid by the hour or for each class that they teach, and receive few or no benefits. Full-time teachers are generally paid a salary and receive health insurance and other benefits if they work for a school system or government.

Related Occupations

The work of adult literacy and remedial education teachers is closely related to that of other types of teachers, especially preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and secondary school teachers. In addition, adult literacy and basic and secondary education teachers require a wide variety of skills and aptitudes. Not only must they be able to teach and motivate students (including, at times, those with learning disabilities), but they also must often take on roles as advisers and mentors. Workers in other occupations that require these aptitudes include special-education teachers, counselors, and social workers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information on adult literacy, basic and secondary education programs, and teacher certification requirements is available from State departments of education, local school districts, and literacy resource centers. Information also may be obtained through local religious and charitable organizations.

For information on adult education and family literacy programs, contact

► The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Potomac Center Plaza, 400 Maryland Ave. SW., Washington, DC 20202. Internet: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/index.html>

For information on teaching English as a second language, contact

► The Center for Adult English Language Acquisition, 4646 40th St. NW., Washington, DC 20016. Internet: <http://www.cal.org/caela>